LOUISE GLÜCK

ANIMALS

My sister and I reached
the same conclusion:
the best way
to love us was to not
spend time with us.
It seemed that
we appealed
chiefly to strangers.
We had good clothes, good
manners in public.
In private, we were
always fighting. Usually
the big one finished
sitting on the little one
and pinching her.
The little one
bit: in forty years
she never learned
the advantage in not
leaving a mark.
The parents
had a credo: they didn’t
believe in anger.
The truth was, for different reasons,
they couldn’t bring themselves
to inflict pain. You should only hurt
something you can give
your whole heart to. They preferred
tribunals: the child
most in the wrong could choose
her own punishment.
My sister and I
never became allies,
never turned on our parents.
We had
other obsessions: for example,
we both felt there were
too many of us

to survive.
We were like animals
trying to share a dry pasture.
Between us, one tree, barely
strong enough to sustain
a single life.
We never moved
our eyes from each other
nor did either touch
one thing that could
feed her sister.